Post-Materialist Particularism:
What Petitions Can Tell Us about Biases in the Policy Agenda

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Abstract

Groups with significant financial resources tend to dominate the pool of lobbyists and political donors. Scholars and reformers often point to the outsized influence of moneyed elites when they consider economic inequality that results from public policy. Here, we expand the scope of existing work by focusing attention on the types of policy proposals placed on the issue agenda in a venue where financial resources are not a pre-requisite for participation – policy-oriented online petitions. Even in this more egalitarian sphere of participation, the policy agenda tends to reflect some of the same biases that exist in other venues. Specifically, petitioners tend to favor particularistic policy proposals over those with broader consequences and they are inclined toward post-materialist issues rather than redistributive ones. In this open and popular venue for policy engagement, redistributive policy is off the agenda. We offer a theory to explain why this is so.

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Politicians spend a lot of time soliciting donations from wealthy patrons and listening to pitches from Washington lobbyists. The input they receive about public policy from these sources seems likely to be a skewed representation of the public's agenda. Martin Gilens (2012) has recently suggested that the access to power granted to wealthy elites results in "a complete lack of responsiveness to the preferences of the poor" (81). This view reflects a long-standing hypothesis that our political system generates policies that are narrower in scope (i.e. particularistic rather than broad-based) and less redistributive than would emerge if not for the influence of elites. This line of thinking leads to policy prescriptions like campaign finance reform, aimed at limiting the power of affluent donors and lobbyists over elected officials.

To demonstrate a policy disconnect between political elites and the mass public, scholars like Professor Gilens treat the policy preferences from representative surveys of the mass public as a benchmark against which to compare policy outputs. While this is an important baseline upon which to judge the quality of representation, it sets aside important limitations of survey analysis. Namely, many citizens do not have well-formed policy views and citizens who do have clear policy preferences prioritize some issues more than others. Aside from broad survey questions about the "most important problem" facing the nation, issue prioritization rarely comes through in analyses of mass surveys. Accordingly, this article takes a new approach to examine the mass public's policy priorities. We investigate the revealed priorities of citizen-activists who participate in one of the most popular forms of direct policy advocacy in the United States: online petitions. This is a venue for policy advocacy in which more than half of Americans report participating and for which there are minimal material barriers to entry. We examine the policy agenda that emerges in that context, from a population of citizens engaged enough on policy matters to actually weigh in. We ask whether the agenda exhibits less of an "upper-class accent" than we might expect from powerful and wealthy elites. This exercise is critically important because the attribution of extant policy

outcomes to the power of lobbyists and donors contributes to the reform agenda of many political observers and activists (e.g. Drutman (2015)). As we will show, an agenda quite uninterested in broad-based redistributive policy can emerge in a far more open venue, like mass petitions.

There are two important reasons why open forums for policy advocacy do not prioritize broad-based and redistributive policy concerns. The first reason is well known to political scientists: Even the most open forms of political engagement are dominated by citizens at the upper end of the socio-economic spectrum. If people require neither special access nor money to be influential, those from higher-income backgrounds - who have civic skills, knowledge, and a heightened sense of efficacy - still dominate the pool of political participants.[1]

But we argue that there is another reason why an open form of policy engagement fails to prioritize redistributive issues. There appears to be a bias toward particularistic, non-redistributive policy that has more to do with psychology than with the institutions of government or the population of interested citizens. When invited to support a policy proposal, citizens are drawn to particularistic proposals that they can wrap their head around, that have foreseeable outcomes, and that pique emotional reactions. In short, citizens who are engaged with politics exhibit a bias toward small, incremental changes that are isolated in their scope. This preference for the particularistic suggests that even aspects of policy advocacy not dominated by moneyed elites exhibit many of the same features that arise in a system supposedly dominated by moneyed elites.

We articulate a behavioral-psychological explanation for policy preferences that contrasts with institutional explanations that stem from the study of interest groups and lobbying. We draw from the literatures on heresthetics and framing, such as studies of episodic versus thematic framing found in communications research. Just as news consumers often react more strongly to episodic frames than to thematic frames (i.e. a story about a particular

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[1]For a recent and eloquent articulation of this point, see Cain (2015).

homeless person is more compelling than a story about homelessness), citizens seem more inclined to support policy reforms that are narrow and episodic, i.e. particularistic, rather than ones that are broad-based.

In testing our theory of post-materialist particularism (PMP), we study behavioral data that has not been widely examined by political scientists: online petitions. We study these petitions because they represent a popular form of participation that is focused on policy (rather than electoral politics) and has few associated costs and barriers to entry. Petitioning has an important legacy in American history (Carpenter and Moore, 2014; Nall, Schneer and Carpenter, 2016; Schneer, 2014; Carpenter and Schneer, 2016). In its contemporary online format, petitioning also represents a profound shift in expanding opportunities to circulate and transmit policy proposals. In the rhetoric of concern over inequality and wealthy donors in today's politics, the obvious - even defining - feature of our times is often forgotten: technological progress has made the channels of mass organization and participation more open to the public than ever before. Online petitions reflect this openness. This is why Drutman (2015), for example, in his recent book about lobbying, suggests that a system of online petitioning could help the mass public compete with professional lobbyists by drawing attention to policies that have support among citizens. But as we will show here, in spite of the low barriers to entry, online petitions reflect a surprisingly parochial policy agenda. The agenda that emerges on this platform sheds light on longstanding questions about the policy preferences of citizen-activists.

We analyze the content and the signatories of over 1,800 petitions transmitted to the White House between 2011 and 2013. We also look at petitions from popular left-leaning organizations, such as MoveOn.org. We do not presume these petitions to perfectly represent the revealed policy priorities of America's citizen-activists; no available data can meet that standard. But we will argue that online petitions can shed light on a large set of issue advocates and can hold broader lessons for American politics. Before we get to the data,

however, we will offer a theory to explain why citizen petitions focus on post-materialistic (i.e. non-redistributive) and particularistic policy goods. As we show, petitions that gather significant support tend to be narrowly focused on small groups, small geographic areas, and small ideological niches. Among the proposals with broader scope, very few focus on large-scale redistributive policies that many presume the mass public wants from government. Instead, they are attentive to post-materialist concerns.

We offer two explanations for our initial findings. The first addresses why post-materialist concerns are so dominant among petitioners. We show not only that high-SES citizens dominate the population of petitioners, but that these petitioners are particularly engaged on post-materialist issues (e.g. gluten-free labeling, open access to academic journals) and far less engaged on redistributive issues (e.g. paid family leave, Obamacare). Petitioners from the poorest neighborhoods are much more likely to support redistributive issues (rather than other issues) compared to people from the richest neighborhoods, but they make up just a tiny fraction of the population of petitioners. Our second explanation addresses why particularistic concerns are so dominant. Here, we use an original survey experiment to test our expectations. We also discuss a wide-ranging literature in political science, psychology, communications, and economics that points to individuals favoring small-scale, isolated reforms rather than large-scale ones. Our observational data on the revealed policy preferences of petitioners is consistent with this literature and with our experimental findings.

1   PMP: A Theory of Policy Input

Studies of representation must begin with a baseline of evaluation. Scholarship by Gilens (2012); Gilens and Page (2014); Bartels (2008); Rigby and Wright (2013) and many others use the stated preferences of mass survey respondents as a baseline for evaluating representation. They measure the deviation between elite policy views or policy outcomes and the preferences

of mass survey respondents. While there is a clear normative value in trying to understand what the public en masse wants out of public policy, this approach is not appropriate for addressing all questions we might be interested in. In particular, standard surveys are particularly poor tools to study the intensity of preferences or the prioritization of issues, especially in terms of understanding the extent to which an individual will be willing to take even a small political action in support of her preferences.

Of course, not all studies of representation treat the passive views of the mass public as the baseline for evaluating elite bias. The alternative perspective is often associated with the pluralist school of thought. The perspective most associated with Dahl (1961) is that policy on any given issue should reflect the views of citizens who care specifically about the issue.

Another version of the pluralist ideal is not that policy should reflect the views of those who care about particular issues, but that policy should reflect the views of people who are active or attentive participants in general. Krosnick and Telhami (1995), citing Almond (1950), refer to this as the guardianship model, which distinguishes groups in the electorate based on their "knowledge about and involvement in politics." Given that so many Americans spend very little time thinking about politics, the guardianship model leads scholars to compare policy outcomes or elite preferences with the preferences of voters, activists, politically engaged, or knowledgeable members of the public.

In studying petition-signers, we consider a realistic, pluralistic environment where citizens who care about policy issues are able to express their preferences and organize fellow supporters with minimal barriers to entry. Petition-signing arguably represents the most open vehicle for policy advocacy in the United States. As we show, it is a tool that almost two-thirds of Americans report using. And while online petition-signing requires a physical resource in the form of an Internet connection, this is a resource that almost 90% of Amer-

icans possess.[2] Unlike arenas such as campaign finance and formalized lobbying, the main barriers to petitioning are not barriers of financial or physical resources, but knowledge, interest, and efficacy. Moreover, to have influence, petitioners do not necessarily need the formal organization of an interest group, but may succeed with looser organizations than envisioned in most pluralist accounts. Indeed, two-thirds of petition signers are not members of an interest group organization at all.[3]

We examine petition-signers merely as an illustration of the kinds of people and interests that arise through a form of policy advocacy that requires engagement among an attentive public but not the tangible resources that beget special insider access in Washington. We do not evaluate petition-signers as a representational ideal, but rather as a realistic alternative voice to the views expressed by moneyed elites. In the Data section below, we will consider in more detail the benefits and drawbacks of examining petition-signers for our purposes.

1.1 Economic Biases in Policy Agenda-Setting

Through an era in which policy advocacy was conducted primarily through organized interest groups in Washington, scholars have offered numerous explanations about why interest group advocacy favors particularistic and non-redistributive outcomes. For one, narrow outcomes tend to be favored by small groups of interested parties, like businesses in a given sector that seek some financial benefit from the government. Because of the high expected returns to each participant from a policy victory, activism is economically rational for actors like businesses and the very wealthy (Olson, 1965). Citizens who care about broad-based interests might dominate the electorate, but in Washington these citizens are "outnumbered and outresourced by business, financial, and professional interest groups" (Strolovitch and Forrest, 2010; see also Strolovitch 2006, 2008). Wealthy individuals and business interests

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[2]While there is still a socio-economic bias to Internet usage, even among the lowest income group, three-in-four report using the Internet (Jansen, 2013).

[3]Based on the authors' analysis of the Pew Survey presented later in this paper.

can use their resources to lobby, join trade groups, hire consultants, and run independent advertisements (Schlozman, 2010). Using these tools at their disposal, the economic elite have not only succeeded in undoing redistributive policies that were in place for much of the 20th century, but they have also managed to forestall efforts at implementing new progressive policies (Hacker and Pierson, 2011).

While the preferences of businesses and moneyed interests can be countered with broader-based interest groups, the broad-based groups have been found to focus on particularistic and non-redistributive outcomes as well. Liberal ideological groups are reliant on the support of benefactors, and benefactors tend to care about post-materialist interests, not redistributive ones (Berry, 2010). Moreover, the culture of Washington leads interest groups to favor small policy victories and constant sound bites, perhaps enabling the groups to stay "relevant," but taking them away from more ambitious goals of broad-based and redistributive policy (Skocpol, 2003; Berry, 2010). Thus, not only do small groups that favor narrow policies dominate the scene, but the large groups purporting to represent broad swaths of the electorate tend to advocate for policies that are narrow and non-redistributive as well.

1.2   Psychological Biases in Policy Agenda-Setting

Institutional characteristics, like the dependency of publicly-spirited interest groups on wealthy patrons, may explain part of the reason why redistributive policies are under-supplied. But there is more to this story. As Olson stated, in regard to political activism that is unlikely to yield greater individual returns than the cost of individual participation, "it would perhaps be better to turn to psychology or social psychology than to economics for a relevant theory" (p.161). And so to psychology we turn.

Policy proposals can be pitched in a multitude of ways to have a persuasive effect, a dynamic Riker (1986) calls heresthetics. For example, in Levine's (2015) recent study, redistributive policies are generally found to be unpersuasive to potential supporters because

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they are framed in ways that remind economically insecure people of their own financial woes. As Levine explains, the language used to mobilize around economic issues is often "self-undermining."

Another critical dimension on which a policy can vary and which may affect its persuasiveness is scope. Is the policy broad-based and comprehensive, or is it narrow and piecemeal? Many of the fiercest policy debates in Washington, such as those concerning immigration and health care, feature partisans arguing over piecemeal versus comprehensive approaches.

In general, there is a persuasive advantage in narrow policies. Consider one important study of piecemeal versus comprehensive policy reform conducted by James Glaser (2002). Glaser found that white voters in Mississippi were much more likely to approve bonds for predominantly black public schools when the ballot permitted voters to support individual items needed in the school system (e.g. heating, computers) rather than a blanket funding request. Glaser hypothesized that voters might generally be more supportive of "very specific projects" because the specificity counteracts concerns that tax dollars get wasted in bureaucracies. In other words, voters may prefer narrowly-tailored proposals because they can more easily understand these policies' consequences. Narrow policies may also be more compelling because advocates believe that incremental policy steps are more likely to be successful than large-scale policy change.

Narrowly-tailored policies are compelling not only because they are often easier to understand and might seem easier to build a coalition around, but also because they are more amenable to "episodic" framing. Consider two policies about bridge repairs. One policy conveys that transportation infrastructure across the country is worsening and that 1,000 bridges need repairs. Another policy focuses on one particular river-crossing that is used by one particular community, where one particular school bus filled with 27 particular children crosses a dangerous bridge everyday. In line with Glaser's logic, the policy to fix the single bridge is smaller in scope and voters can rest assured that funding will not be wasted on

"bridges to nowhere." But the narrow policy can also be framed in rich detail, which appeals to the sympathies and emotions of potential supporters.[4]

Episodic frames have been found to be powerful tools (Iyengar, 1990; Iyengar and Simon, 1993; Iyengar, 1991; Gross, 2008; Aarøe, 2011). In Aarøe's recent experiments, episodic frames are more likely than thematic frames to elicit emotions like compassion, pity, anger, and disgust. When frames provoked the emotions of experimental participants, they were also considerably more persuasive than thematic frames. Critically, episodic framing of societal problems affects how voters attribute blame and responsibility for the problem in question. Iyengar not only found that the news media tend to present issues like poverty episodically rather than thematically, but also that "the thematic frame engenders a stronger sense of societal responsibility, whereas the episodic frame engenders a stronger sense of individual responsibility (Iyengar 1990, p. 35)." On issues for which large-scale redistributive policies are targeted, episodic framing may elicit strong emotions but not necessarily a strong position that the government or society ought to respond with large-scale policy reform.

Of course, it is certainly possible (and common) for policymakers to try to frame broad policies episodically. As one example, the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, a policy involving pay discrimination, is memorable because it is tied to a particular individual whose story is well-known. The title of the bill conveys a specific story. However, the episodic framing of broad policy issues is not straightforward and can even backfire, for the very reasons articulated by scholars like Iyengar (1991) and Gross (2008). By focusing on an individual (like Lilly Ledbetter), a policy advocate may be able to garner sympathy for the specific individual, but by doing so may undermine the attempt to focus on a broader issue of policy. This is precisely what Iyengar discovered. On the other hand, when a policy itself is narrow (an appeal to help one person, one group, one town), there is no daylight between the episodic

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[4]Note that our use of the term 'framing' here is anchored not in research on 'equivalence' framing, in the Kahneman and Tversky (1984) tradition, but rather in the broader and looser 'emphasis' framing notion that relates to concepts like agenda-setting, persuasion and priming. See Scheufele and Iyengar (2010).

pitch and the policy proposal (i.e. Here's Lilly Ledbetter's story; let's help Lilly Ledbetter specifically).

In addition to the rich research in political science and media studies on framing, there is, of course, a large body of psychology research that also supports the notion that narrow presentations of public policy are more likely than abstract presentations to engender support. For example, individuals have trouble taking abstract, baseline information and making correct inferences about individual cases (Kahneman and Tversky, 1973). Concrete information is found to be processed more easily and accurately than abstract information (Kearney, 1994; Paivio, 1991; Woodall, Davis and Sahin, 1983). A large body of research on "construal level theory" tests hypotheses about abstract versus concrete modes of thought. One set of findings suggests that when there is more psychological distance between an individual and a given problem, as there is with abstract large-scale policies, individuals feel less personally responsible and feel they are less able to make a difference (e.g. Trope and Liberman, 2010, see also, Rogers and Bazerman 2010).

Building on concepts and evidence about framing, heresthetics, and information processing, we suspect that voters in general are predisposed to favor narrow, or particularistic, policy proposals rather than broad ones. "Big ideas," like national proposals that affect the lives of millions of people, may have some intrinsic appeal, particularly to ideological liberals, but small ideas have advantages in winning supporters in the broader electorate and maybe among elites as well. Smaller policy proposals that are isolated in scope lend themselves to easier comprehension and a closer connection between cause and effect. Small proposals may appear to supporters as more likely to succeed than large proposals. Small proposals also lend themselves to vivid portrayals about how a policy will affect specific individuals.[5] For these reasons, we expect citizens to be more inclined to favor the particularistic; all else

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[5]Recent research by Petersen (2012) also suggests that there is an evolutionary bias toward small-group thinking about redistribution.

equal, citizens will prefer policy proposals that are incremental and narrow.

In essence, our theoretical contribution is in the application of long-standing findings from research on mass behavior and communication to the realm of public policy. We expect that even when economic resources are not required to influence the policy agenda, narrow and particularistic policies will still win favor because of their inherent appeal. By extension, we argue that citizens do not just favor particularistic policies, but also post-materialist ones. By post-materialist, we mean policies that are not about the transfer of money or benefits via taxation from rich to poor. By definition, redistribution policies are broad, not narrow. If, as we hypothesize, citizens generally prefer narrow policies, then it follows that they will be inattentive to redistribution. There are also two other reasons for an inattention to redistribution. First, given that policy proposals might use episodic-style framing to gain support or elicit emotion, and given that such framing tends to result in attributing blame to individuals rather than to society (Iyengar, 1990), we suspect that redistributive policies will arouse little support. Second, given that the rich are more likely to have time to participate in policy debates, we expect that the population of activists in the electorate will be more engaged with post-materialistic concerns than redistributive ones.

2   Data

Our objective in this analysis is to explore the *revealed* policy preferences of citizens engaged in a low-cost form of policy advocacy. What kind of policies interest the subset of the mass public that cares enough about a policy to take even a low-cost action? To answer this question, we turn to online petitions transmitted to the White House. In 2011, the White House established a program called 'We the People,' whereby individuals could design a petition that could be circulated online. If the proposal achieved a certain number of signatures within a certain amount of time, the White House would promise a response.

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The White House program was modeled after a similar program set up by No. 10 Downing Street, which provided British citizens the opportunity to petition their government as early as 2006 (Hale, Margetts and Yasseri, May 2-4, 2013).

There are several reasons we focus on the White House petitions. First, petitions are policy-oriented rather than election oriented. The policy issues can be classified and organized by topic and by scope. Second, this petition program is established by the executive of the government and invites petitions targeted to a wide range of government functions. Other similar venues for policy input are either non-governmental (like `change.org`) or are specific to individual policy domains (like public commenting opportunities within agencies).[6] Third, the White House has published datasets providing the text, title, and signatory information for the universe of petitions, thus providing researchers with the opportunity to study these petitions.

Contemporary online petitions descend from the oldest form of citizen policy activism in the United States (Karpf, 2010). While political scientists have studied historical petitions (Carpenter and Moore, 2014), our study represents one of the first attempts to study the present-day incarnation. As such, readers may have some questions about these petitions:

First, *whereas the target of the petitions we study is the White House, isn't the legislative branch a more appropriate target for policy advocacy?* Citizens, like lobbyists, direct a wide range of policy questions to the administration, not just to Congress. This is, in part, because the President's administration has substantial discretion in agenda setting and policy implementation, including in favoring select constituencies through particularism (Kriner and Reeves, 2015). In larger part, the President is viewed as the nation's leader and thus receives a disproportionate amount of praise, blame, and responsibility for a wide range of policy matters. In the decentralized legislative branch, individual Members of Congress

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[6]As a check on our results, we also briefly examine petitions circulated by liberal groups MoveOn.org and CREDO.

solicit policy input from their constituents, but the legislature as a whole does not do this.

Second, *is the White House online petition program merely a public relations ploy to demonstrate openness and responsiveness, or does the program actually influence policy?* We have interviewed several White House staffers who either manage or have managed the petition program. Not surprisingly, the staffers expressed that the program represents a genuine attempt to be responsive to the mass public. But the staffers were also able to provide clear examples of how citizen petitions changed policy. The government's position on telecommunications policy, animal rights, and intellectual property changed as a direct result of the petitions, according to the White House. The petitions also have the ability to embarrass the White House, which takes away from the argument that the whole endeavor is a PR stunt. For example, much news has been made of a petition that garnered well over 100,000 signatures asking the President to pardon Edward Snowden. While the White House promised to respond to petitions that garnered this many signatures, the administration delayed any response at all, presumably due to the political sensitivity of the issue. In any case, the sheer volume of petitions and petitioners indicates that this is at least a form of policy engagement in which millions of Americans participate and derive some value.

Third, *is the White House petition program used primarily by organized interest groups and therefore fails to represent a more open process of engagement than other models of policy activism?* White House staff explained to us that the petitions do not generally originate from organized interest groups. They suggested two reasons for this. First, the White House petition program requires that individuals fill in their personal information on the `whitehouse.gov` website; an organization cannot submit "pre-signed" forms. What this means in practice is that an organization promoting a petition is unable to gather personal data from the signatories. Interest groups tend to prefer modes of public engagement that enable the groups to generate lists of activists they can use for future financial, membership, and volunteer solicitations. Second, success and failure in obtaining signatures cannot easily

be spun. If a petition receives a certain number of signatures, the White House responds; otherwise, the White House does not respond. The staffers suggested to us that interest groups fear that they will publicly fail, and so they opt for forms of engagement in which they can spin their own success story. As a result, while some petitions may originate from traditional interest groups, mostly they arise from less traditional organizational tools, such as through network campaigning via online forums, like Reddit, Facebook, and other social settings.

Fourth, *are the kinds of people who sign petitions representative of the public at large?* Our objective here is not to study a representative sample of Americans, but rather to capture the revealed preferences of policy activists. After analyzing the content of petitions, we will discuss the population of signatories. Specifically, the White House provides the zipcode of every signatory, allowing us to make use of zipcode-level demographics. We also analyze two survey items on representative samples of Americans, which asked respondents about online petitioning. In assessing the traits of online petitioners, our results are consistent with past studies finding that SES-stratification in participation is similar online as it is offline (Schlozman, Verba and Brady, 2010). Petitioning is arguably the most widespread form of policy activism. It is low in cost - so low that it is sometimes called *slacktivism* - and it is available to anyone with access to the Internet, which in the United States represents almost 90% of the population (Fox and Rainie, 2014). Petitioning the White House is not something that every American can do or does, but it is a realistic representation of a mass policy advocacy activity that is open to almost all.

Fifth, *do activists direct their serious policy concerns through the formal system of policy engagement, such as the advocacy of interest groups, unions, and political parties, and leave their less important concerns to venues like online petitions?* This is a very difficult question to answer. Our perspective makes an assumption that policy advocacy through petitions is primarily motivated by expressive rather than instrumental ends. Individuals who promote

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and sign petitions may do so mostly with the aim of vocalizing their preferences, not because they have an expectation that their actions will lead directly to major policy change. We make this assumption because expressive motivations are thought to dominate many forms of mass participation, ranging from voting to donating. Such motivations are nevertheless important to understand because they can reflect upon the priorities of the public and can lead to important real-world outcomes. If petition-signing is primarily an expressive act, then we do not believe that citizens would strategically direct their more important concerns to other venues and their less important concerns through this venue. Rather, we assume that they will express views on issues that are important to them through all the mechanisms available to them, including online petitions.

2.1   Data Specifics

The White House petition data is made available in SQL format on the White House website (`https://petitions.whitehouse.gov/developers`). It is updated periodically. The version we use here contains petitions dated from September 22, 2011 through April 29, 2013. The dataset includes 1,806 petitions. For each petition, we have the title and text of the petition, as well as the number of signatures obtained, and the zipcode of each petitioner. Throughout the analysis, we assess the petitions by weighting them according to the number of signatures they received. The 12,960,273 signatures in the petition data are not distributed equally across the petitions. Seventy percent of the petitions received fewer than 5,000 signatures each, and eight percent of the petitions received more than 25,000 signatures each. We are interested in petitions that received few signatures and many signatures, but when providing the overall picture of petitions, we weight by signatories. This decision does not affect the substantive findings.

3   Scope and Policy Target of Petitions

Our main interest is in the scope of petitions (i.e. whether they are broad-based or particularistic) and in whether they are redistributive in nature. In distinguishing particularistic from broad-based policy, we consider policies aimed at particular individuals, small group financial interests, narrow ideological interests, or small geographic areas to be particularistic. Conversely, broad-based petitions are targeted to a national interest or a large subset of the population. Of course, these distinctions require some judgment calls, but they are usually clear-cut. For example, a petition aimed at providing financial relief to college students is considered broad-based, but a petition aimed at providing a financial benefit to dental hygiene students is considered particularistic.

After classifying petitions as broad-based and particularistic, we then subset the broad-based petitions into redistributive and non-redistributive groups. By redistributive, we mean that the petition aims to transfer money or benefits from the rich to the poor or from the poor to the rich. This definition of redistributive is motivated by Lowi's (1964) seminal work, which distinguishes redistributive policies by the "categories of impact," noting that redistributive policies tend to involve categories "approaching social classes...the haves and have-nots" (p. 691). Thus, redistributive-oriented petitions could be about taxes or about government services. Government benefits like healthcare subsidies, public education, social security, and food stamps are redistributive. A policy aimed at making the tax rate more progressive or less progressive would be considered redistributive no matter the direction of the policy proposal. In practice, however, the overwhelming share - 90% - of redistributive petitions were "pro-poor." Particularistic policies, even ones that might help a set of poor or rich individuals, are, according to this framework, not redistributive because the "categories of impact" are too small. A proposal to help a single school, for example, is more akin to "pork" (i.e. distributive policy) rather than to a redistributive policy. In this sense, only the

broad-based policies can be segmented into redistributive and non-redistributive categories.
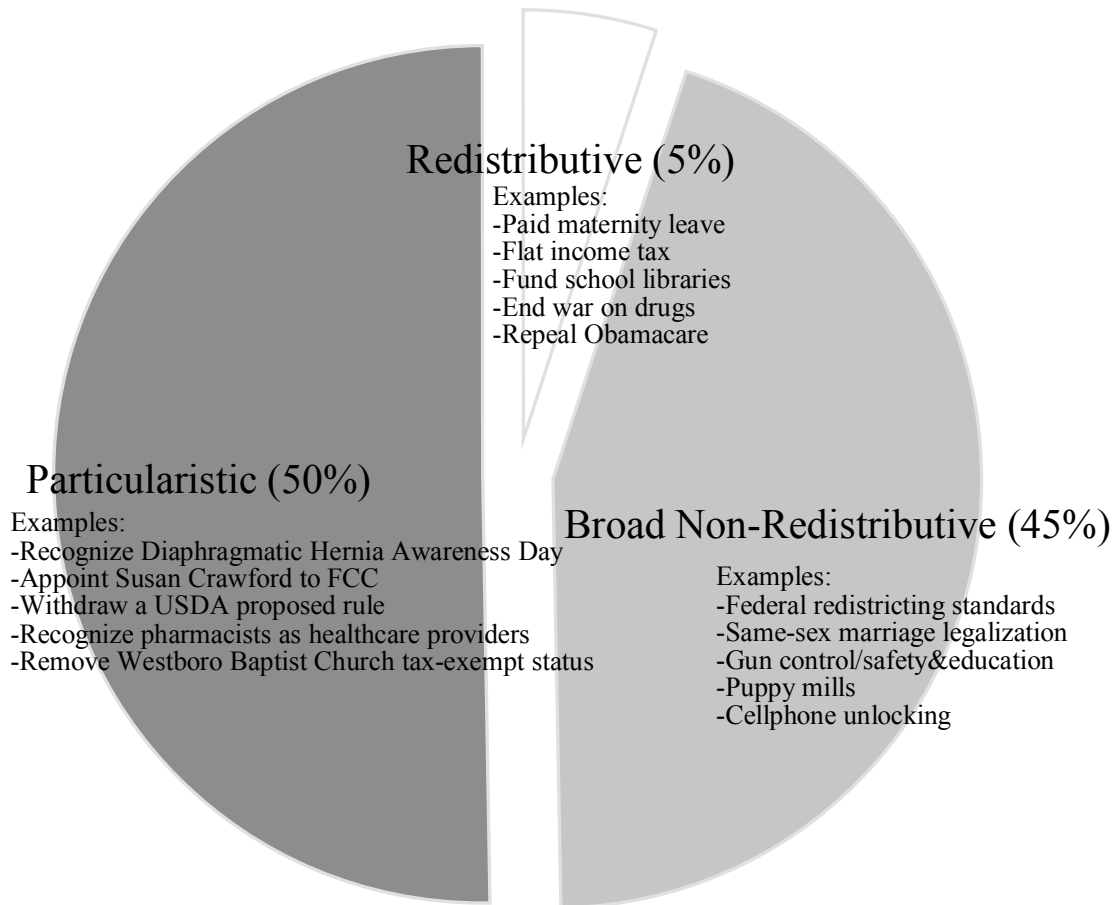
Of course, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between redistributive and non-redistributive policies, leading some scholars to use an intersectional approach to classify policies (Strolovitch, 2008). However, since our interest is on how citizens are approaching the policies they are advocating for, we focus on the content of the petitions to provide guidance on categorizing policies. For example, a petition aimed at legalizing marijuana because marijuana is not dangerous enough to be classified as a Schedule I drug is considered broad, non-redistributive. A petition aimed at ending the war on drugs because of discriminatory prosecutions against racial minorities would be considered redistributive. In this way, we are also following the logic of Lowi's (1964) schema; specifically, he notes that, "in the long run, all governmental policies may be considered redistributive ... but politics works in the short run" (p. 690). Thus, in focusing on whether petitioners themselves are using redistributive arguments for their petitions, we are maintaining an important distinction that helps us avoid seeing everything through the lens of redistribution.

Finally, we flag a small minority of petitions (15%) that have as their chief aim either humor or partisan venting rather than actual policy advocacy. Examples of humor petitions are those that ask the government to build a Death Star or change the national anthem to an R. Kelly song. Examples of venting petitions are those that call for states to secede from the union, for firing or impeaching specific government officials, or for deporting Piers Morgan. These kinds of petitions do not contain reasonable policy recommendations, and so we remove them from our analysis.

To code petitions according to their status as particularistic, broad-based non-redistributive and redistributive, we supervised a team of research assistants to carefully code each petition. We first sampled from the data and coded 125 petitions ourselves. We trained the assistants to follow our sample and code the rest of the dataset. We asked them to flag ambiguities, which we assessed separately. We were particularly attentive to petitions that were

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ambiguously redistributive. To bias our coding against our expected findings, we instructed the coders to treat ambiguously redistributive petitions as redistributive.

Figure 1: Petitions Categorized

Redistributive (5%)
Examples:
-Paid maternity leave
-Flat income tax
-Fund school libraries
-End war on drugs
-Repeal Obamacare

Particularistic (50%)
Examples:
-Recognize Diaphragmatic Hernia Awareness Day
-Appoint Susan Crawford to FCC
-Withdraw a USDA proposed rule
-Recognize pharmacists as healthcare providers
-Remove Westboro Baptist Church tax-exempt status

Broad Non-Redistributive (45%)
Examples:
-Federal redistricting standards
-Same-sex marriage legalization
-Gun control/safety&education
-Puppy mills
-Cellphone unlocking

Note: Classification of 1,562 petitions transmitted to the White House through the government's "We the People" program, weighted by 10,971,175 individual signatures.

Figure 1 shows the results. Overall, 50% of the petitions are classified as particularistic, 45% are broad but not redistributive and 5% are considered redistributive. The figure shows some illustrative examples of the kinds of petitions classified into these three categories, with examples drawn from the range of petitions by their popularity. As illustrated by the examples, the particularistic petitions cover a range of issues, but their aim is always very

narrow - a particular person should be appointed to the FCC, a particular USDA ruling should be altered, narrow interest groups should be benefited or punished. In their scope, these narrow appeals seem quite similar to those that would be advanced by organized interests. This is remarkable because half of all petitions exhibit this narrowness in scope. In this form of policy advocacy open to anyone with an Internet connection, which requires minimal organization and minimal effort, half of the signatures are focused on parochial issues.

The second-largest category of petitions reflects those geared to broad-based, but non-redistributive issues. Examples include cellphone unlocking, animal rights, gun control, same-sex marriage and redistricting. These petitions are focused on policy that affect the whole country or at least a large subset. They are issues that do not relate to relative material benefits to rich and poor. Of course, many of these issues could have some downstream effect that ends up benefiting rich more than poor, or vice versa, but the issues here do not bear directly on taxation or government benefits reasonably classified as redistributive. These petitions exemplify post-materialist concerns. Nearly half of all the signatures in the dataset focus on issues like sex, guns, and drugs - hot-button issues, but not related to redistribution. Whether because these issues can be framed especially persuasively or because of the upper-class-accented population that participates in policy advocacy, post-materialist concerns dominate the policy agenda of petitioners.

Finally, only 5% of petitions focus on policy areas connected with redistribution. Examples include guaranteed paid maternity leave, funding for school libraries, and ending the war on drugs (when the petition provided a rationale that focused on redistributive concerns). Notice in the examples of redistributive petitions that this category also includes a small number of petitions that would re-distribute benefits away from the poor, such as repealing Obamacare and imposing a flat income tax. In fact, the two redistributive petitions with the most number of signatures are both anti-Obamacare, and the pro-flat-tax petition is the

tenth highest earner of signatures in the redistributive category. Together, these three petitions account for about 20% of the signatures in the redistribution category. Even though petitions are an open form of policy advocacy, surely not dominated by special interests and wealthy patrons in the same way that formal interest group advocacy is, proposals aimed at large-scale redistribution are quite rare.

Digging into the specific petitions, we see clear attempts at mobilization around redistributive concerns, but those attempts do not generate very many signatures. "Renew tax cuts for 98% of all taxpayers" earned 1,519 signatures, "Create public sector jobs and put Americans back to work" earned 1,819 signatures, "Extend Unemployment Benefits" earned 3,057 signatures, and "Create a single-payer healthcare system" received 3,147 signatures. The petition that might traditionally be defined as redistributive that garnered the most signatures asked to "forgive student loan debt to stimulate the economy." This petition garnered 32,008 signatures.

By way of comparison, a petition to "not allow the FDA to regulate premium cigars" garnered 37,513 signatures. A petition to "require free access over the Internet to scientific journal articles arising from taxpayer-funded research" earned 65,704 signatures. A petition about GMO labeling earned 77,106 signatures, and a petition asking the government to stop a trade agreement with Vietnam received 150,945 signatures.

Most of the petitions that achieved large numbers of signatures are genuine appeals focused on legitimate policy concerns - human rights overseas, hate speech at home, gun control and second amendment rights, marijuana legalization, high speed rail, and so on. And some redistributive issues, like protecting Social Security, appear multiple times in different petitions and earn a significant number of signatures. However, even combining all the Social Security petitions and all the other redistributive petitions, and weighting by number of signatures, such petitions amount to a drop in the bucket. The policy agenda of White House petitioners is remarkably focused away from redistributive concerns and toward

particularistic and post-materialistic ones.

This phenomenon is not particular to White House petitions. It is even apparent in contexts that are explicitly dedicated to progressive issues. On the political left, two large organizations circulate petitions and mobilize support: MoveOn.org and CREDO. Unlike the White House site, which is a forum open to both sides, MoveOn.org and CREDO are focused on mobilization on the left. Both organizations graciously shared with us data on their fifty most popular petitions. For MoveOn.org, three redistributive issues appear in the top-50: student loan benefits, protecting Social Security, and breaking up too-big-to-fail banks. But the overwhelming majority of the fifty most popular petitions are focused on non-redistributive issues. These issues are post-materialist (i.e. protect whales and dolphins, gun control, food policy) or particularistic (i.e. justice in the Trayvon Martin case).[7] The CREDO petitions exhibit the same pattern. About 15% of the signature-weighted petitions are focused on redistributive issues, such as taxing the rich, protecting entitlements, and student loans, but the others are post-materialistic and particularistic. Indeed, the single most popular policy-oriented petition from CREDO is an appeal to Congress to fund NPR and PBS. Thus, even in a policy setting exclusive to left-wing activists, the policy agenda is decidedly focused on issues unrelated to redistribution.

4　Why Post-Materialist Particularism?

We offer two explanations for why the policy agenda as expressed through petitions to the White House is dominated by post-materialist and particularistic concerns. One reason relates to the characteristics of petitioners: political petitioners are disproportionately drawn from the wealthier classes. Wealthier Americans are less likely to be affected by government benefits and they are more likely to focus on post-materialist concerns (Inglehart, 1977).

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[7]Levine (2015) studies MoveOn, noting that most MoveOn members are middle-class professionals.

Using a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2012, we first examine Americans'
use of online petitions. We note the typical caveats that survey respondents tend to misreport
behaviors that seem socially desirable (Ansolabehere and Hersh, 2012). Nevertheless, an
impressive proportion of American adults - one in five - reported that they had signed an
online petition during the previous twelve months. This is considerably higher than the
percentage of Americans who said that they were a member of an organization that tries to
influence policy (14%) or worked for a party or candidate (7%) or attended a political rally
or speech (10%).[8]

Figure 2: Self-Reported Behaviors by Income Category

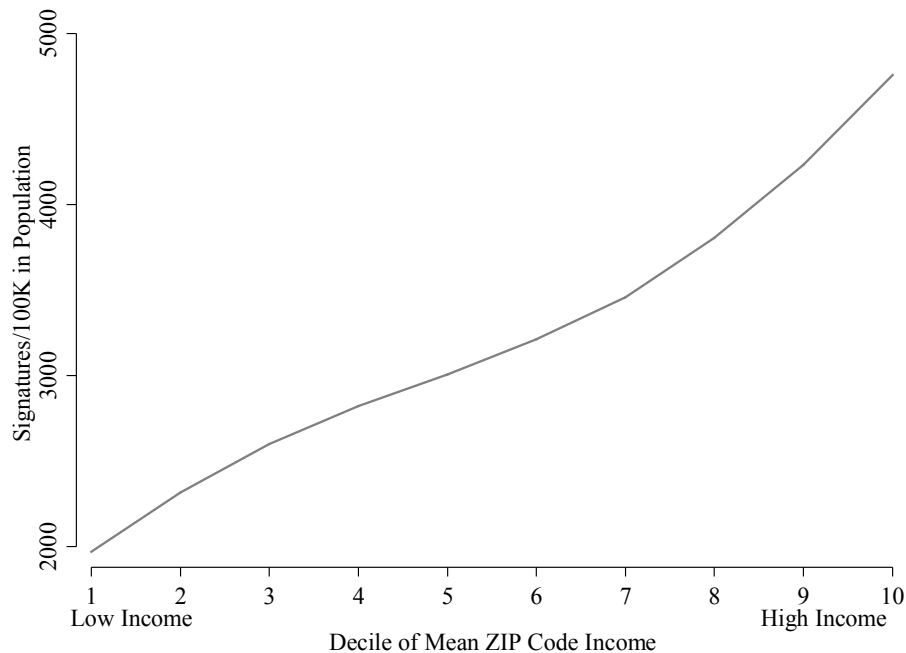*Note: Each question asked if the individual had engaged in the activity during the previous
year. Entries are calculated using sampling weights.*

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[8]In a 2014 Cooperative Congressional Election Study survey, we asked respondents if they had *ever*
signed an online petition (i.e. not just in the last year). Sixty-one percent of the weighted sample of 1,313
respondents reported that they have signed a petition.

To gain some perspective on this rate of reported participation, consider Figure 2. On the horizontal axis, we show five, self-reported, family income categories. On the vertical axis, we plot the rate of participation in a number of activities, including belonging to an interest group, working for a party or candidate, attending a political speech or rally, contributing to a political candidate/organization/cause, or contacting a government official about an issue. As Figure 2 shows, all of these behaviors exhibit positive relationships with income. For some activities, particularly political donating, the relationship is steep (and no doubt would appear steeper if the sample size permitted us to look at more fine-grained income categories). For petitioning, one-third of the respondents with income over $150,000 report having signed an online petition, compared to 20% among those earning $30,000-60,000.[9]

Figure 3: White House Petition Signatures by ZIP Code Income

Turning to the White House data, all individuals must enter their zipcodes when signing a White House petition. We linked the zipcode identifier with data on the mean income
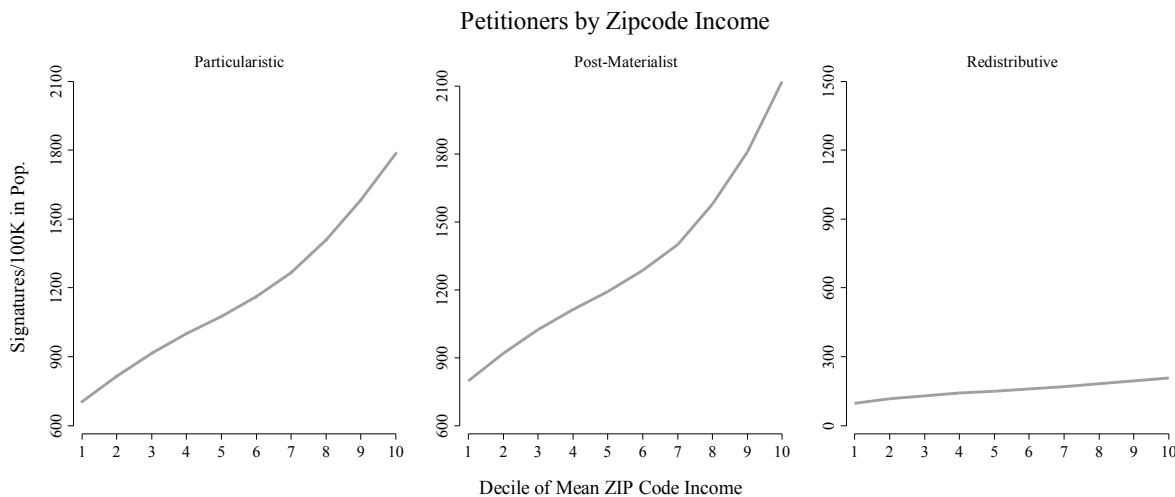
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[9]The Pew survey also asked respondents about signing paper petitions, and a similar income bias existed for non-online petition signing. Specifically, 36% of those in the highest income group reported signing a paper petition compared to just 17% of those in the lowest income category.

level and population count for each zipcode.[10] We collapse the zipcodes into deciles (i.e. the poorest tenth of zipcodes to the richest tenth of zipcodes), and observe the number of signatures in the decile divided by the population in the decile.

The data are first summarized in Figure 3. Higher-earning zipcodes are more likely to participate in White House petitioning, and the relationship steepens among the higher income groups. Individuals living in the 10% of zipcodes that have the highest income are two-and-half times more likely to have signed a White House petition than individuals in the poorest 10% of zipcodes. Note that the relationship with income in Figure 3 is similar to what we observe in Figure 2. White House petitioners, like most types of political activists, come disproportionately from higher-earning zipcodes.

What effect does the income bias have on the success of different petitions? This question is difficult to answer with certainty, but evidence suggests that the income bias may generate a policy agenda that is focused on post-materialist concerns.

Figure 4: Petition Support, by Zip Code Income and Category of Petition

Petitioners by Zipcode Income

Consider Figure 4. In this figure, we divide the petitions into particularistic, redistributive, and broad non-redistributive (or post-materialist) categories. For each category, we calculate the number of signatures per population of each decile of zip-code income. Note that all three subplots in Figure 4 are on the same scale, but the third plot is shifted down to accommodate the data. Figure 4 shows not only that the redistributive petitions are far less popular than the others, but that the relationship between number of signatures and income is also distinct. For the redistributive petitions, the highest-income zipcodes are twice as likely to sign a petition as the poorest zipcodes. But for the post-materialist petitions, the highest-income zipcodes are almost three times as likely to sign a petition compared to the lowest-earning zipcodes. In other words, individuals from richer neighborhoods are more likely than those from poorer neighborhoods to sign petitions in general, but their enthusiasm for petitions appears highest when the issues are unrelated to redistribution.

4.1 The Appeal of the Narrow

While the broad-based petitions to the White House are overwhelmingly focused on post-materialist rather than redistributive concerns, nearly half of the petitions are not broad-based at all. They are particularistic - focused on individuals, small group benefits, or narrow interests. By drawing on research in psychology and communications, we have provided an explanation for this phenomenon: narrow appeals are more concrete and can be understood more easily by individuals. Narrow appeals can also more easily be framed episodically.

To explore this phenomenon in the context of petition-signing, we ran a survey experiment. The experiment was administered in May 2015 to a nationally representative sample of 500 YouGov respondents. The experiment contained two stages. These stages attempt to mimic certain key features of petition-signing. In the first stage, respondents were given a prompt:

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Consider Figure 4. In this figure, we divide the petitions into particularistic, redistributive, and broad non-redistributive (or post-materialist) categories. For each category, we calculate the number of signatures per population of each decile of zip-code income. Note that all three subplots in Figure 4 are on the same scale, but the third plot is shifted down to accommodate the data. Figure 4 shows not only that the redistributive petitions are far less popular than the others, but that the relationship between number of signatures and income is also distinct. For the redistributive petitions, the highest-income zipcodes are twice as likely to sign a petition as the poorest zipcodes. But for the post-materialist petitions, the highest-income zipcodes are almost three times as likely to sign a petition compared to the lowest-earning zipcodes. In other words, individuals from richer neighborhoods are more likely than those from poorer neighborhoods to sign petitions in general, but their enthusiasm for petitions appears highest when the issues are unrelated to redistribution.

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We are interested in understanding what kinds of petitions individuals might be interested in signing. Below is a list of the titles of petitions. Please select two petitions that you would like to hear more about on the following pages.

Each respondent then saw four titles of petitions, two of which were broad and two of which were narrow. The petitions covered topics related to immigration, home loans, retirement benefits, and unemployment benefits. On each topic, respondents saw either a narrow or broad petition title, with the selection randomized. Table 1 shows the eight titles.

Table 1: Respondents were shown one petition title from each row, selected randomly.

Broad Condition	Narrow Condition
Allow over 5 million Americans to stay in their homes	Allow Joan Perrington to stay in her home
Extend unemployment benefits	Extend unemployment benefits for Colusa County, California
Exempt all retirement pay from Federal and State income taxation	Exempt all military retirement pay from Federal and State income taxation
Stop the deportation of parents of U.S. Citizens	Stop the deportation of Diana Reyes

In this first stage of our experiment, it might seem surprising for respondents to select these narrow petitions at all. After all, these respondents do not know Joan Perrington or Diana Reyes, who are fictional. It is extraordinarily unlikely that the respondents themselves live in Colusa County (a rural county populated by about 20,000 people) or even that they know anybody who lives there. And while we did not collect data on the military veteran status of our respondents, it is likely that about 90% of our sample are not active military, in the reserves, or veterans (based on population estimates of these groups).[11] Given this, one might expect that respondents are drawn to the broad petitions that are more likely applicable to themselves, to people they know, or to the broader public.

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[11]In the 2012 Cooperative Congressional Election Study, just 1% identified as currently in the military, while 13% indicated that they had previously served in the military.

And yet, 60% of the respondents selected at least one narrow petition to learn more about. Even when the two randomly-selected narrow petitions were about particular people (i.e. the narrow immigration condition and the narrow home loan condition), and not about a geographic area or popular subgroup like veterans, still 43% of the respondents selected to hear more about these narrow petitions.

Narrow policies, like those about particular people, subgroups or geographies seem to have two advantages. The advantage that is well-known from the interest group literature is that narrow policies have built-in constituencies who have a stake in the policy outcome. If there was a real Diana Reyes, she might have a community of friends, neighbors and family who would sign the petition and promote the cause. If there was a real policy to specifically help unemployed people in Colusa County, those who lived there would have a clear stake.

But here we see something else going on. Many of our experimental subjects, who have no stake or personal connection, are nevertheless drawn to the narrow petitions. This is the second, unappreciated advantage of the narrow: even people who are unconnected to the relevant issue or affected party are still drawn to these narrow cases. There might be legitimate ideological reasons for this: a respondent might be opposed to helping millions of undocumented immigrants but supportive of helping individual cases. But the psychology and communication literatures also suggest that these narrow policies could be appealing because they are easier to understand and more intriguing since they contain stories about individual people or small groups that are easy to imagine.

Another possibility is that respondents click on narrow petitions out of curiousity, but are less likely to sign those petitions after their curiosity is satisfied. The results from the second stage of our experiment suggest that this is not the case. After clicking on two of the petition titles, the respondents then saw paragraph-length texts of the petitions they selected. The texts of the petitions can be found in the appendix (Tables 3 and 4). Respondents were asked to indicate how likely they were to sign each petition, on a seven-

Table 2: Likelihood of signing petitions in each issue area depending on whether petition viewed was broad or narrow.

Issue	Broad	Narrow	Difference
Mortgage Relief	5.291	5.011	-0.280
Unemployment Benefits	5.301	5.071	-0.230
Retirement Tax Exemption	5.571	5.883	0.312
Deportation Cessation	4.855	5.352	0.497

Entries are average ratings on seven-point scale where 7 is "definitely would" and 1 is "definitely would not" sign the petition. No difference is statistically significant.

point scale. First, we look at the between-subjects differences in the likelihood of signing a petition within each issue category depending on whether the individual viewed the narrow or the broad version of that petition. Table 2 shows the average likelihood of signing (on a seven-point scale) for those who saw the narrow version of each petition compared to those who saw the broad version. In the case of mortgage relief and unemployment benefits, there was slightly higher support for the broad petition compared to the narrow petition, while on the issues of taxing retirement plans and deportation, the narrow petition garnered more support than the broad one. In none of these cases was the difference between the broad and narrow groups statistically significant.

Second, we examine within-subjects differences in ratings between narrow and broad petitions among the 60% of subjects who chose one narrow and one broad petition to read more about. On the broad petition this group read, the average rating was 5.1 on the seven-point scale. But for the narrow petition, the average respondent rating was 5.6, a difference of half of a point on a seven point scale ($N = 267$, difference-of-means p-value < 0.01). Thus, among this set of respondents who saw both a broad and a narrow petition, there was significantly more support for signing the narrow petition.

The appeal of the narrow is no secret to those who motivate individuals to take action. In fact, in describing the features of successful petitions, the popular petition website `change.org` tells its audience: "Successful petitions ask for something very specific...Instead of a

petition titled 'I Demand A More Responsive Government in Chicago,' focus your petition to something like this: 'Fix The Potholes On 14th Street.'"[12] Petitioners are told to ask for small things like fixing potholes not because `change.org` has some ideological agenda toward particularism, but because they observe which petitions succeed and fail; empirically, narrow petitions seeking small-scale concrete policy reform are more attractive than those attempting broad-based change.

5 Discussion

Many previous scholars have asked why the U.S. policy agenda is dominated by particularistic and post-materialist issues rather than redistributive ones. Our examination of mass petition data takes us an important step forward in understanding why this is the case. Even in a context that is arguably more open to popular participation than any other avenue of policy advocacy, there is almost a complete lack of attention to issues of redistribution. The preferences of the 1% wealthiest Americans cannot explain this. The institutional functioning of Congress and its dependence on lobbyists and donors cannot explain this.

What can explain this post-materialist particularism are two phenomena. First, not only are relatively well-off individuals more likely than the poor to engage in this open forum of policy advocacy (a finding consistent with past research), but petitioners from wealthier areas are particularly attentive to post-materialist concerns like gluten-free labeling and particularly inattentive to redistributive ones (recall Figure 4).

Second, particularistic policies have advantages over broad policies in their ability to garner support. Prior research suggests this is because narrow policies are easier to understand and easier to describe episodically. For these reasons, a narrow policy proposal not only benefits from a narrow constituency that has a heightened interest, but it also benefits

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[12] "How an Online Petition Works," https://www.change.org/guides/how-an-online-petition-works.

from a larger set of individuals who find something compelling in the particularistic, even if they are not directly affected. We believe this is in large part why 50% of the petitions transmitted to the White House are narrow and why 60% of participants in our experiment sought to learn more about a petition that affected a narrow constituency.[13]

In a venue in which everyday citizens express their policy views to the White House, post-materialist particularism dominates. In our view, this is unlikely to occur because citizens are expressing other, broader policy goals through alternative vehicles. In general, we think that post-materialist and particularistic policies are what capture the interest of citizen-activists. Of course, this does not mean that broad redistributive policies never capture their interest; they certainly can and do. But the absence of pro-redistribution sentiment in the petitions we study, including in petitions circulated by liberal interest groups, suggests a bias against the promotion of such issues.

To speculate beyond the scope of our study, in the real world of policymaking where particularism often does seem to dominate, the inherent attraction to narrowness may be an overlooked explanation of outcomes. Rather than arguing that particularism is the result of institutional advantages of moneyed interests who demand particularistic outcomes from government officials, we believe that a bias toward particularism is explainable on simpler grounds. Namely, when considering a policy proposal, individual legislators, like most people, will be attracted to policies that are small in scope, easy to understand, amendable to risk-assessment, and accompanied by compelling narratives. The policy agenda of online petitioners is important because it may reveal an underlying bias in policymaking that was hard to sense in the institutional setting of a legislature. Why do legislatures favor the particularistic? At least part of the story is likely in the power of post-materialist particularism rather than in the power of moneyed elites.

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[13]It may also help to explain why, for example, Bill Clinton made much of his re-election campaign in 1996 about "policy miniatures" or "McIssues" – such as school uniforms and V-chips – which were overwhelmingly popular with voters.

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6   Appendix

6.1   Survey Experiment

The survey experiment reported in the paper was fielded May 20 - 27, 2015 by YouGov. All results reported in the paper utilize the sampling weights. The tables below show the full text for the second stage of the experiment, where individuals were asked to register their likelihood of signing a petition on a 7 point scale ranging from "Definitely would not sign" to "Definitely would sign."

Table 3: Broad and Narrow Versions of Petition Text, Immigration and Home Loans

Broad Condition	Narrow Condition
Immigration	
Stop Deportation of Parents of U.S. Citizens	**Stop Deportation of Diana Reyes**
As many as four million U.S. citizens have a parent who is an illegal immigrant. For the hard-working and law-abiding parents of American children, we are asking that the government cease deportations. Many of the immigrants came to the U.S. to escape terrible circumstances in their home countries, and have sought a new life in the United States. They are cherished members of their communities and want to continue to see their children grow up here. The government should stop deportation proceedings now!	Diana Reyes is loving mother who came to the United States from Guatemala in 1990. She escaped terrible circumstances in Guatemala and sought a new life in the United States. Since coming to America, she has always kept a job and has never been in trouble with the law. She has two American-born children, ages 20 and 22. Because of bad advice from a lawyer about declaring her illegal immigration status, Diana is now at risk of being deported. She is a cherished member of the community and wants to continue to see her children grow up here. The government should stop deportation proceedings now!
Home Loans	
Allow over 5 million Americans to stay in their homes	**Allow Joan Perrington to stay in her home**
Because of unfair home loans and lending practices that are all too common, many Americans got a raw deal. The economy collapsed in 2008, and today there are still over 5 million American homeowners whose houses are worth less than their mortgages. These individuals are at risk of losing their home to foreclosure, often after years of raising children in their homes and building their communities. Fannie Mae can help at-risk homeowners by reducing the amount they owe. Let's help struggling homeowners stay in their homes! We're organizing to share their story so the government will give them a break!	Joan Perrington is 67 years old and has lived in Denver her whole life. She's lived in her home for 35 years - a home she built with her late husband. In 2007, Joan had to borrow against her house to pay off medical debts. Because of unfair home loans and lending practices that are all too common, Joan got a raw deal. After the economy collapsed, her house lost so much value that it is worth less than her mortgage. Joan is at risk of losing her home to foreclosure, after all these years raising children and building a community. Fannie Mae can help Joan by reducing the amount she owes. Let's help Joan stay in her home! We're organizing to share Joan's story so that the government will give her a break!

Table 4: Broad and Narrow Versions of Petition Text, Unemployment and Retirement Benefits

Broad Condition	Narrow Condition
Unemployment Benefits	
Extend unemployment benefits	**Extend unemployment benefits for Colusa County, California**
The recession hit America's working poor hard. They are struggling to stay afloat. These Americans are able, willing and actively looking for work, but the jobs haven't come back yet. The government's unemployment benefits are providing America's working families with a safety net. Across the country, over 2.4 million people are currently collecting unemployment benefits. But unless the government acts, this support will expire. We need the government to keep our communities afloat! Extend unemployment benefits to America's hard-working families!	Colusa County is a small rural county in northern California. In Colusa, where agriculture is the main industry, the recession hit the working poor hard. They are struggling to stay afloat. These Americans are able, willing, and actively looking for work, but the jobs haven't come back yet. The government's unemployment benefits are providing Colusa's working families with a safety net. In this small community, over 1,000 people are currently collecting unemployment benefits. But unless the government acts, this support will expire. We need the government to keep our communities afloat! Extend unemployment benefits to Colusa County's hard-working families!
Retirement Benefits	
Exempt all retirement pay from Federal and State income taxation	**Exempt all military retirement pay from Federal and State income taxation**
Retirement pay is subject to federal income taxes as well as state income taxes in many states. Support America's retirees by signing this petition to ask the Federal Government to exempt all retirement pay from federal and state income taxation. The Federal Government can set the example to support no income taxation on retirement pay. Support our retirees!	Veterans' military retirement pay is subject to federal income taxes as well as state income taxes in many states. Support America's veterans by signing this petition to ask the Federal Government to exempt all military retirement pay from federal and state income taxation. The Federal Government can set the example to support no income taxation on military retirement pay. Support our retired veterans!